



Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 1997 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

The California Expanded AFP Program offers prenatal screening to all pregnant women who are in prenatal care by the twentieth week of pregnancy. This screening program analyzes a sample of the woman's blood in order to identify women who are at risk of having a pregnancy complicated by certain serious birth defects: neural tube defects, abdominal wall defects, or the chromosomal abnormalities, Down syndrome and trisomy 18. Women who have been determined to be at increased risk are referred to the State-approved Prenatal Diagnostic Centers for genetic counseling, a detailed ultrasound examination, and amniocentesis. The California Department of Health Services requires that women receive an educational booklet to assist in obtaining informed consent for this voluntary test.

Respondents (N=888) to the 1997 California Women's Health Survey who said that they were currently pregnant or had been pregnant in the last five years were asked questions about the Expanded AFP Program to determine whether this educational program was effective. Respondents who reported declining the test were asked additional questions regarding their reasons for having done so.

- 75% recalled receiving the informational booklet about the Expanded AFP Program, and 68% recalled having their blood drawn for the test.
- Percentages of women receiving the booklet and having their blood drawn did not vary significantly over racial/ethnic categories.
- The percentages did vary among women of different ages.

Approximately 30% of eligible respondents reported choosing not to take part in the Expanded AFP Program. These women were asked additional questions to identify factors that are involved in their decision-making process.

- Of the women who had received the booklet but declined to have the test, over half said that they would not want to know about a birth defect.
- Approximately one-third said that they would not want to have to decide about terminating a pregnancy.
- A smaller number of women declined the test because of dislike of blood draws.

PRENATAL SCREENING FOR BIRTH DEFECTS: THE CALIFORNIA EXPANDED AFP PROGRAM

Genetic Disease Branch

Public Health Message:

While the California Department of Health Services' Expanded AFP Program has been successful, barriers prevent some women's participation in this successful program. The California Women's Health Survey has identified some reasons women do not participate in the Expanded AFP Program.

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